

The
Melville Society
N E W S L E T T E R

WINTER, 1956

Volume XII

Number 4

The ninth annual meeting of the Society (no formal meetings were held in 1945, 1947, or 1951) took place under the chairmanship of President Nathalia Wright in the Mayflower Hotel, Washington, D.C., on Friday morning, December 28. Approximately twenty members and guests attended. In the absence of the secretary, Wilson L. Heflin kindly served as secretary pro tempore.

The business meeting included the report of the secretary, election of Heflin as a member of the executive committee (term expiring December 31, 1961), and election of Dr. Sava Klickovic of the University of Belgrade (Yugoslavia) as an honorary member. Dr. Klickovic, long a Melville enthusiast, has been preparing a study of Melville's works as considered from a "juridical point of view." A poem which he has written in memory of Melville will be printed in a forthcoming issue of the *Newsletter*. In the United States for a visit of only two months, Dr. Klickovic was able to attend our meeting, bringing with him on behalf of Gil Wilson the set of colored slides previously announced as one of Wilson's donations to the Society. The slides have since been deposited in the Melville Room of the Berkshire Athenaeum (Pittsfield, Mass.), where they are available for the use of members and others.

Our executive committee now consists of the following persons: Harrison Hayford (term expires 1957); Nathalia Wright (term expires 1958); Howard C. Horsford, president (term expires 1959); Laurence Barrett, president-elect for 1958 (term expires 1960); and Wilson Heflin (term expires 1961). Tyrus Hillway continues as secretary (three-year term expires 1957).

The program included the reading of papers and discussion mainly centered around *The Piazza Tales* (published 1856). Three papers were presented: "The Ghost of Major Melville," by Merton M. Sealts; "An Interpretation of Melville's 'Paradise of Bachelors and Tartarus of Maids,'" by George R. Creeger; and "'Benito Cereno': A Modern Myth," by Sava Klickovic. Information regarding

the possible future publication of these papers has not yet been received by the secretary. Reading of the papers was followed by a general discussion.

NEXT MEETING

Our new president for 1957, Howard C. Horsford, has already scheduled the next (tenth) annual meeting of the Society. It will be held from 10:45 A.M. to 12:15 o'clock on Tuesday, September 10, in the Loft Room of the Memorial Union building at the University of Wisconsin. (As most members know, the Modern Language Association will hold its 1957 convention in September instead of December.) Suggestions for the program will be welcomed. They may be sent either to President Horsford (Department of English, Princeton University) or to the secretary.

MOTION PICTURE AND OPERA

Gil Wilson reports in a letter to Nathalia Wright that he has spent the last six months of 1956 on a nationwide tour publicizing John Huston's motion picture production, *Moby Dick*. He will continue to present his illustrated lecture to American collegiate audiences during 1957.

He has prepared the libretto of an opera, *The White Whale*, for which he hopes to secure a musical score by Dmitri Shostakovich. An invitation extended to the great Russian composer has brought a cordial reply, indicating that Shostakovich is deeply interested in the idea of international cooperation among artists. At the moment, however, he is busily engaged in writing a new symphony for Sweden.

Wilson is hopeful that *Moby-Dick* may become the vehicle for increasing understanding and good will among the peoples of the world.

AHAB'S LEG

Although there is no explicit evidence in *Moby-Dick* as to which of Captain Ahab's legs the white whale bit off, Wilson Heflin has found certain references in the text which appear to support the notion that not Ahab's left leg (as in the recent motion picture) but his right leg was the ivory one.

Heflin says: "I use Chapter L of *Moby-Dick* as the basis of my argument. There we find an account of Ahab's taking 'particular preparative heedfulness' with his whaleboat: 'his solicitude in having an extra coat of sheathing in the bottom of the boat, as if to make it better withstand the pointed pressure of his ivory limb; and also the anxiety he evinced in exactly shaping the thigh board, or clumsy cleat . . . : when it was observed how often he stood up in that boat with his *solitary knee* (Heflin's italics) fixed in the semi-circular depression in the cleat, and with the carpenter's chisel gouged out a little here and straightened a little there; all these things, I say, had awakened much interest and curiosity at the time.' Ahab, in especially fashioning his whaleboat to accommodate his infirmity, shaped the clumsy cleat to fit his good leg."

It may be noted that, in every whaleboat which the secretary has examined, the "clumsy cleat" or "thigh thwart" had its depression for the knee placed somewhat left of center, a fact which would indicate that it was intended to support the harpooner's left leg.

NOTES

A recent publication of general interest to persons in the field of American literature should be of particular interest to many members of the Society. It is a book written by the late Stanley T. Williams of Yale. The title is *Two in a Topolino* (literally, "little mouse," the Italian nickname of a small Fiat station wagon), and it gives a delightful account of the tour which Professor Williams and his wife made of Italy in the spring of 1955 in the second-hand vehicle of this description which they bought in Italy. The book has been printed privately and may be obtained (for \$2.50) from Mrs. S. T. Williams, 152 Waite Street, Hamden, Connecticut.

Another biography of Melville has appeared on the market, this one derivative and intended only for children. It is Jean Gould's *Young Mariner Melville* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1956). Price, \$3.00.

Obscure item: Lloyd N. Jeffrey, "A

Concordance to the Biblical Allusions in *Moby Dick*," *Bulletin of Bibliography*, XXI, 223-229 (May-August, 1956).

A radio version of "Bartleby" was presented Sunday, November 25, on the "Favorite Story" program over the American Broadcasting Company network. Ronald Colman is master of ceremonies for the program. The title used was "The Strange Mr. Bartleby," and William Conrad acted as narrator of the story.

Members of the Society have been somewhat concerned about the health of Mrs. Eleanor Melville Metcalf. She was operated upon in October but has made an excellent recovery. At latest report no complications had developed.

Harrison Hayford is spending the present academic year in Italy, chiefly in Florence. No mailing address is available for him at present.

Melville scholars undoubtedly should have a special interest in a contest sponsored by *The Explicator* magazine, which offers an annual award of \$200 for the best book of *explication de texte* published in America. Winner for 1955 was Professor Hyatt H. Waggoner's *Hawthorne: A Critical Study*.

Members may pay their dues for 1957 to the secretary at any time (\$2.00 for active membership and \$1.00 for associate membership). Notices will be sent with the next issue.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Cash on hand,					
January 1, 1956	-	-	-	\$	50.23
Income, 1956	-	-	-	-	135.16
Total	-	-	-	-	\$185.39
Expenses, 1956					
Printing expense	-	-	-	\$	82.20
Postage	-	-	-	-	35.67
Supplies	-	-	-	-	14.88
Total	-	-	-	-	\$132.75

Cash on hand,					
December 15, 1956	-	-	-	\$	52.64

(Note that both income and expenses have decreased slightly as compared with 1955. Our cash balance, however, remains about the same this year as it was last year.)

THE *Melville Society* NEWSLETTER
IS PUBLISHED QUARTERLY FOR MEMBERS OF THE
Melville Society, a group of literary scholars and others interested
in the life and works of Herman Melville. The Society seeks to
facilitate the exchange of information among its members, to
stimulate the study of Melville's life and works, and to encourage
literary, historical, and bibliographical research. Membership is
two dollars per year and includes all services of the Society. Asso-
ciate membership (non-voting) is one dollar per year and includes
all issues of the Newsletter. Address Tyrus Hillway, secretary, at
Colorado State College, Greeley, Colorado.